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17. OCCURRENCE OF *MELANOBATRACHUS INDICUS* BEDDOME 1878 IN MATHIKETTAN SHOLA, WESTERN GHATS¹

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The Malabar Black Narrow-mouthed Frog *Melanobatrachus indicus* Beddome 1878 (Anura: Microhylidae) is endemic to the southern Western Ghats of India (Dutta 1997). Distribution of this species is poorly known due to lack of intensive surveys. No firsthand information was available since its description by Boulenger (1890). Recently, it has been reported from the Kalakkad – Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (Vasudevan 1997), Periyar Tiger Reserve (Daltry and Martin 1997) and from Valparai (Ishwar 2000).

The Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), in association with the Kerala Forest Department, is conducting studies on the reptiles of Mathikettan shola. This shola is a part of the western slope of Western Ghats, and is located in the Idukki district of Kerala (Fig. 1). Altitude of the area is 1,400-1,800 m above msl, and it receives over 2,500 mm of rainfall annually. Mathikettan shola has recently been proposed as a national park, which includes about 6,500 ha of tropical evergreen forest and 700 ha of abandoned cardamom plantations.

Two specimens of *Melanobatrachus indicus* were observed on January 17, 2004 in the Santhampara of Mathikettan shola. Photographs are deposited with SACON. External appearance and coloration of these frogs were similar to that described by Boulenger (1890): body slender, head without cranial ridge, circular pupil, skin pustular above and smooth below, and black dorsal surface with a scarlet patch near the groin and between forelegs. One of the specimens (live) measured 33 mm in snout-vent length, and it is the largest

specimen reported so far (Daltry and Martin 1997).

During the present study, both frogs were found under decaying wood. The surroundings had thick leaf litter and canopy cover (> 80%), and a perennial stream was found about 200 m away. All the reported *M. indicus* so far have

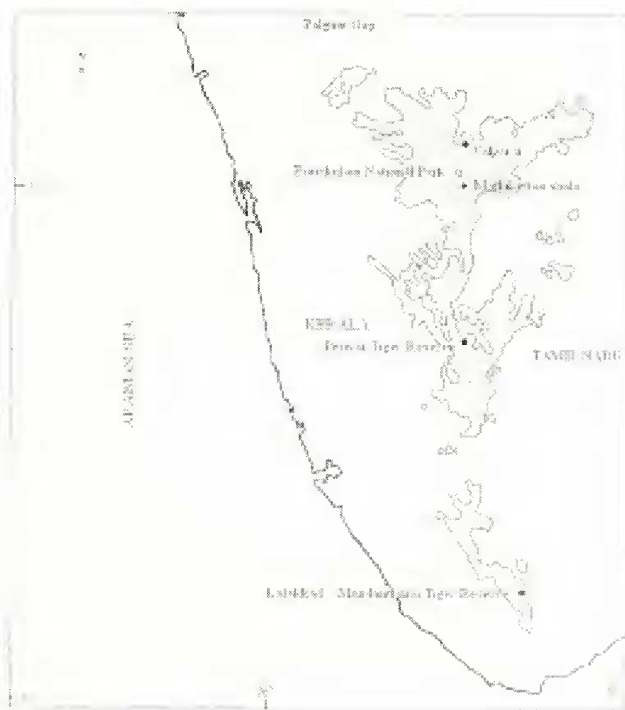


Fig. 1: Map of the southern Western Ghats showing Mathikettan shola and the adjoining hills

been sighted within five metres of perennial streams (Daltry and Martin 1997; Ishwar 2000). The present observation reveals that this species may also occur a considerable distance away from water. The altitude of this locality was 1,450 m msl, and all previous sightings of *M. indicus* were within 1,000-1,500 m. This indicates the restricted distribution of this species with respect to altitude. Though the present record lies within the distributional range of this species, lack of precise locality data makes the present observation noteworthy. This is also one of the four reliable records

available for this species since its description (Daltry and Martin 1997; Vasudevan 1997; Ishwar 2000), which is the second for the Western Ghats of Kerala.

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18. NEW RECORD OF THE SIMPLE ASCIDIAN *STYLELA PLICATA* (LESUEUR 1823)¹

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A simple ascidian — *Styela plicata* (Lesueur 1823) is reported for the first time from Tuticorin harbour, Tamil Nadu, India. Only two species of the genus *Styela* have been reported earlier from India (Renganathan 1981; Krishnan *et al.* 1989); both the species reported, *Styela bicolor* and *Styela canopus*, occur as fouling organisms in Tuticorin and Bombay harbour.

Styela plicata (Lesueur 1823)

Occurrence and distribution: Numerous specimens were collected from the sheltered waters of Tuticorin harbour (8° 48' N, 78° 11' E), seen attached to piers, pilings, other harbour installations, corals and also from the pearl oyster cages suspended at a depth of 4-5 m. This species has been previously reported from Australia (Hartmeyer and Michaelsen 1928; Kott 1952, 1972 a, b, c, 1975), Hong Kong (Tokioka and Nishikawa 1975; Kott and Goodbody 1982), western Indian Ocean (Michaelsen 1918), Japan (Tokioka 1960), West Indies (Van Name 1921, 1930, 1945), Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea (Harant 1927a, b; Harant and Vernieres 1933; Heller 1877) and eastern coast of North America (Van Name 1912; Huntsman 1912, 1913).

Synonymy: *Ascidia plicata* Lesueur 1823, p. 5, *Ascidia*

plicata: DeKay 1843, p. 259, *Styela gyrosa*: Heller 1877, p. 255, *Styela gyrosa*: Herdman 1882. p. 155, *Styela plicata*: Traustedt 1883a, p. 123, *Styela plicata*: Traustedt 1883b, p. 478, *Styela plicata*: Traustedt 1885, p. 44, *Styela pinguis*: Herdman 1899, p.40, *Tethyum plicatum*: Hartmeyer 1909, p. 1359, *Tethyum plicatum*: Van Name, 1912, p. 569, *Styela plicata*: Huntsman 1912, p. 149, *Styela plicata*: Huntsman

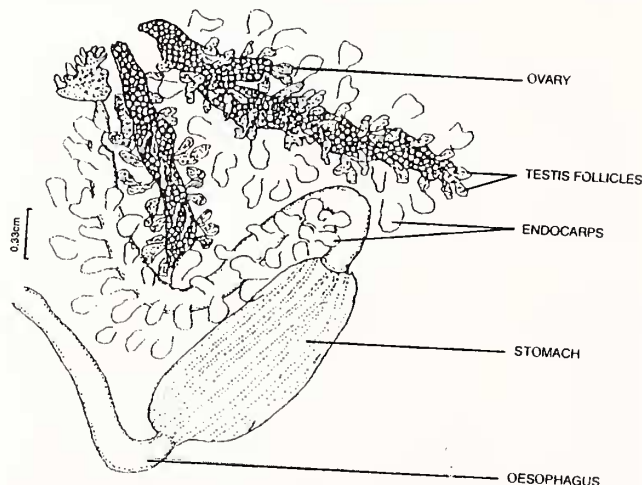


Fig. 1: *Styela plicata*: gut loop and gonads